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SUBJECT: Southern Lebanon: The Shia Crucible

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Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D. C. 20505

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

19 March 1986

Southern Lebanon: The Shia Crucible [REDACTED]

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Summary

The continuing growth of Shia extremism and reinfiltration of Palestinian guerrillas are likely to worsen political instability in southern Lebanon over the next year and intensify sharply the cycle of violence between Israeli forces and their enemies across the border. The Israelis face difficult dilemmas in responding to increasing violence in the south. Israeli leaders realize that strong military reactions, such as their week-long operation last month, exacerbate the situation, but domestic political demands pressure them to act forcefully. Israel's sweep operation last month increased the strength of the radical Shia Hizballah and helped erode the power base of more moderate Amal militia leaders, who are feeling the pressure from fundamentalist opponents throughout Lebanon. Shia radicals have demonstrated that they are determined and able to provoke the Israelis to mount retaliatory actions that radicalize the population, attract new recruits into the Hizballah, and force Amal moderates to embrace extremist positions. [REDACTED]

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This memorandum was prepared by [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] the Arab-Israeli Division, Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis. Information as of 19 March 1986 was used in its preparation. Questions or comments should be addressed to Chief, Arab-Israeli Division, [REDACTED]

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Cross-border attacks into northern Israel almost certainly will multiply as order deteriorates in the south. The Hizballah and various Palestinian groups share a commitment to "carry the struggle on to Jerusalem" and are increasingly cooperating in some operations. The UN peacekeeping force, UNIFIL, is unable to halt the deterioration. A UNIFIL withdrawal next month, however, would provide a psychological boost to the militias and could hasten the inevitable power struggle for control of the south. [REDACTED]

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The Hizballah has been gaining ground in southern Lebanon for the past year at the expense of Amal. Fundamentalist leaders are pursuing an aggressive campaign of political, military, economic, and religious activities aimed at winning the support of the Shia population. Local clerics, who wield substantial influence in their villages, use Friday sermons to preach the political propaganda of the fundamentalists, including activism against Israel and the need for an Islamic revolution in Lebanon. [REDACTED]

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Hizballah leaders are spending considerable amounts of Iranian-supplied money to win popular support in the south. Projects funded by the radical organization include rebuilding homes destroyed by the Israelis, constructing fundamentalist schools and mosques, paving roads, delivering shipments of food and medicine from Iran, providing scholarships for Shia students, and establishing a welfare system for the poor. UN officials in the south report that the Hizballah pays its soldiers and officials a significantly higher wage than that which is customary in Amal and other Lebanese organizations. [REDACTED]

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Hizballah paramilitary leaders continue to expand their network of garrisons, training centers, and arms caches in the south. The guerrilla organization contains both overt militia elements and underground cells that conduct specific operations.

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The Israeli Dilemma: How to Avoid Overreaction

The Israelis face difficult dilemmas in the south. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] Domestic political pressure to ensure the security of Israel's northern border, however, demands that the attacks cannot be ignored. Israel has tried to minimize the longterm negative impact of its operations in the south by limiting the length of the operations and by disciplining their forces from overreaction. [REDACTED]

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Israel's surrogate Lebanese militia, the Army of South Lebanon (ASL), is much more ruthless and insensitive to Shia concerns than IDF troops. In the recent sweep operation, ASL troops were responsible for most of the instances of brutality against civilians. Since Israeli advisers work closely with the approximately 1000-1500 ASL troops, local residents understandably implicate Israel for atrocities committed by the ASL, which further incites anti-Israeli sentiment. [REDACTED]

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Regardless of the negative impact of Israeli operations in the south, Israeli leaders publicly state that periodic punitive actions are necessary to drive home forcefully to the local population that Israel will not tolerate an escalation of violence in the south. Furthermore, they believe that Israel's only viable option is to underscore that continued Hizballah attacks on Israel would result in Israeli reprisals--with the local populace the inevitable losers. [REDACTED]

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Israel sees no near-term alternative to relying on the security zone and the ASL as a buffer to attacks on northern Israel. Israeli leaders are unwilling to commit large numbers of their own troops in Lebanon for fear of increasing Israeli casualties. They are equally unwilling to abandon the zone and risk escalating attacks on northern settlements--a move certain to increase domestic criticism. At the same time, Israel refuses to allow UNIFIL to deploy south, since it views the force as ineffective in stemming terrorist attacks. [REDACTED]

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Palestinian Activities

Palestinian guerrilla organizations are rebuilding their networks in southern Lebanon. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] both pro-Arafat and pro-Syrian Palestinian groups are reinfiltrating men and equipment into the Sidon area. Most estimates for the number of Palestinian

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fighters throughout southern Lebanon range from 1,000-2,000. Palestinian leaders are confident that their organizations can thrive in the lawless, anarchical environment of Lebanon and view the south as their only viable base of operations against Israel.

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Amal leaders are trying to curtail Palestinian activities in the south, but cooperation between Palestinian fighters and Hizballah members is thwarting Amal's efforts.

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various Palestinian organizations provide money and training to the Hizballah in return for tactical cooperation and free passage through areas under control of the radical Shias.

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Many of the hardline Palestinian guerrilla groups remain committed to mounting cross-border operations against northern Israel. Paramilitary teams from the DFLP and the PFLP-GC, among others, have been caught crossing the border in recent months. Israeli officials believe Palestinians may have played a role in the Hizballah ambush last month in which two Israeli soldiers were captured, according to the US Embassy in Tel Aviv.

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Outlook

Amal still appears numerically stronger than the Hizballah in the south, but the trend clearly favors the fundamentalists. Although many southern Shias disapprove of religious fanaticism and seek only to live in peace, the continuing Israeli occupation of the security zone and frequent shelling of Shia villages by the ASL are radicalizing attitudes among the population. The Hizballah is cultivating an image of aggressiveness and activism, which contrasts with the widespread perception of Amal as lethargic and corrupt.

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The Hizballah has a vested interest in keeping the pot boiling in southern Lebanon and therefore is likely to step up its violence against Israeli and ASL forces. Last month's events demonstrated to radical Shias that they can manipulate Tel Aviv to their advantage through aggressive guerrilla actions such as ambushes in the security zone. Israel's seizures during the sweep---which included Hizballah prisoners and large quantities of military materiel---will be only a temporary setback for the radicals. Moreover, the prolonged detention of Shia prisoners, either in the Khiyam prison in the security zone or in Israel proper, is likely to boost the Hizballah's image.

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Cooperation between the Hizballah and Palestinian groups almost certainly will enable both to intensify cross-border operations---especially rocket attacks---into northern Israel in the coming months. Both groups seek to "carry the struggle on to Jerusalem" and therefore view a tactical alliance as mutually beneficial. This Hizballah-Palestinian coalition poses a direct challenge to Amal's authority in the south and will make it even more difficult for Amal to regain the ground it has lost. []

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Amal moderates will increasingly be forced to embrace radical positions to survive in the changing political climate of the south. [] many Amal members are becoming more sympathetic to cross-border operations against Israel. Usually moderate Amal leaders, including Nabih Barri and Da'ud Da'ud, have begun to incorporate hardline rhetoric into their speeches. We believe most Amal leaders will readjust their attitudes to reflect the new militancy of the southern Shia population. []

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The UN peacekeeping force, UNIFIL, is unable to halt the deterioration, and the spiral of violence in southern Lebanon is likely to gain momentum regardless of whether UNIFIL withdraws when its mandate expires in April. Although none of the guerrilla groups views UNIFIL as a military obstacle, its departure may provide a psychological boost to militia leaders intent on pressing their campaign against Israel and its surrogates. It could also set off a power struggle between the Shia and ASL as they seek to occupy UNIFIL positions. A UNIFIL withdrawal therefore probably would hasten the deterioration of the south. []

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In our judgment, the daily presence of the ASL and some 1,000 Israeli troops in the security zone provides the Hizballah and its Palestinian allies their most useful rallying cry against Amal's moderation. Syrian Vice President Khaddam recently told the US Embassy in Damascus that Amal, with Syrian assistance, could prevent the cross-border war from intensifying if the Israelis abandoned their security zone in the south. Although Amal probably could not prevent every cross-border attempt by radical elements, it would be in a considerably stronger position to do so if the Israelis withdrew. []

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Amal, however, refuses to talk directly with the Israelis or provide explicit public guarantees about border security. Even if Amal were willing to do so, Israel would be extremely unlikely to give up the ASL and security zone in favor of relying on the vagaries of Lebanese politics and Amal's good intentions. []

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